

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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LOUIS DRAYCOTT.

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CHAPTER VII. THE FESTIVAL OF HOPE.

APRIL THE THIRTIETH, 1879.—"I wish dear Glennie were at home," says Aunt Dacie, "he would say that all this was 'quite perzackly.'"

Aunt Dacie is at once cheerful and tearful, like an April day. She has fast hold of Mazie's hand, and keeps kissing it every now and then, smiling and nodding at me the while; then wiping her eyes and shaking her head just a little, as who should say: "You can understand these mingled feelings of mine, good friend." As indeed, I do. But how we have ever brought her to such a frame of mind; how things have ever come to such a pass at all; how we are all gathered round the bright bit of fire that the still chilly evening renders so pleasant; how it can be that she sits there so gently, happily agitated, knowing everything; how it is that I, Louis Draycott, love Mazie, and that Mazie—oh, precious, blessed truth!—loves me; how all these things are so, is a wonder past all marvelling.

Mine must have been a double wooing. I must have laid siege to Aunt Dacie's heart and Mazie's both at once. At least, this is what Dumphie says. Dumphie, ever so little graver than his wont, but quite a happy spirit among the rest of us, following Mazie with a wistful gaze as one looks at a thing that one is about to part with presently; but full of little tender jestings and those "quips and cranks" that are germane to such occasions as the present.

For this is the day of our betrothal;

this is the day through which, as through a golden gate, I enter upon a new life—my darling's helpful hand for ever clasped in mine.

"I suppose," says Aunt Dacie, blinking the ready tears away, and speaking with a sad tremble in her voice, "that feeling like this, all upset, you know—glad and sorry all in a breath, as you may say—makes one's thoughts go back to the old days, and Glennie's little droll ways and sayings—the dear child! If he were here, Louis, he would hark back to them, too, and tell you that the 'greatest worseness' of it all is—Mazie's having to leave us."

Mazie is clinging about her in a moment.

"Not yet," she cries; "not yet. Not for ever such a long while yet!"

And the lovely eyes look back at me as she turns her gracious head, as though they fain would say: "Don't mind me speaking like that! I must comfort her. It isn't that I want you really to be a long time without me; it is not that I don't want to come; but—don't you see, dear love; don't you see?"

And I smile back at her, all comprehending.

I am convinced that Dumphie has had a long talk—a very long talk, with Aunt Dacie the night before, a difficult talk, too, I should imagine; but one in which he played his part well for Mazie's sake and mine. I am quite sure that he hid all sign of the trouble and amaze that had stirred his great loving heart at all that I had told him, quite convinced that he put himself entirely out of sight, that he thought only of what was for Mazie's happiness and mine, and at last succeeded in persuading Aunt Dacie that she had been quite deep and artful—the dear,

simple soul!—and seen how the wind was blowing all along; had, in fact, taken the affair under her wing—even helped it on ever so little.

I am sure that these things are so, for the dear lady has a cunning look—a would-be wise demeanour—that is at once quaint and delightful; a determination not to allow that she has been astonished, or the very least in the world taken unawares by anything. She did not seem a bit surprised to find, when she came home from a long walk this afternoon, that Mazie was not alone, that she was half smiles, half tears, and altogether content; and that the man by whose side she sat, and whose hand held hers close and fast, could find but few words to tell of the radiance of joy that made Prospect Place, with its one poplar-tree, seem to him the fairest Eden the world ever held or could hold. I hardly know now how I told my darling that I loved her. I know Kezia's gnarled old face, with keen dark eyes beneath white parted hair, looked somewhat curiously at me as she told me that "The mistress was out; but Miss Margaret was in, and I could 'step through' if I liked." And when I had "stepped through," and saw "Miss Margaret" standing there as she had risen to greet me, looking just a little shy, but not ill-pleased, I know not what I said. It seemed as if all in a moment I had dared to gather her to my heart, dared to touch the sweet trembling lips with mine, had said to her, almost in a whisper, though Kezia had gone down the kitchen-stairs long since:

"Do you love me, my darling—my darling?"

And she had answered gravely, with her great bright eyes raised to mine:

"Neither rhyme nor reason can express how much!"

All womanly, she gave with loving and generous hand the knowledge I craved for. She had "no cunning to be strange," but laid bare to me all her pure and gentle heart; told me how the love, that filled it now even to the brim, had grown and grown, day by day, and little by little; had seemed at first a treachery to those whose lives had centred round hers so long; but at length, seen more truly, had taken the guise of an added intensity, not an overshadowing of all the rest, since I, she was so sure, would love those dear ones only second to herself.

Terribly in earnest is this dear Margaret

of mine in every thought and feeling—one to suffer keenly if occasion should come; to love with passionate devotion, with utter selflessness; guileless as a child; deep-hearted as a woman; trustful, pure, and true. What have I done—poor wayfarer in life's journey—to have and to hold a prize so precious!

I confess to having felt some fear when Aunt Dacie appeared upon the scene of our wooing. I expected to be greeted like a robber intent upon stealing some cherished jewel; but Mazie made me see how true it is that "perfect love casteth out fear." She never stirred from the shelter of my arm—shy and proud, both at once, there she stood, trembling, yet resolute.

A moment the two women looked at each other; then they were clinging to one another, kissing, laughing, sobbing; and Aunt Dacie's neat little bonnet seemed likely to be crushed out of all shape. I found plenty to say to plead my cause; but it was before no stern judge. Dumphie had done his work well.

Before long, Aunt Dacie was seated on the sofa by the window, and we were all talking together as if Mazie and I had been betrothed for a year at least. But a sudden rush of feeling, I know not how or why, came across my darling.

She flung herself upon her knees before Aunt Dacie; her cheek took the "pale complexion of love;" her eyes shone bright through tears.

"It is so strange," she said, "so wonderful, that Louis should be all this to me; that I should be all this to him; that each should change the whole life of the other, and make it deeper, truer, and more beautiful. Oh, Aunt Dacie, how can I be thankful enough; how can I make myself worthy of it all? Tell me—tell me!"

As I write, it comes back to me again—the passion and the sweetness, the entering upon the wonderful new life, the baptism of joy to me, who had known so little. . . .

It was an hour not to be forgotten; an hour, the very memory of which would be honey stored in the heart for a possible time of sorrow yet to come.

How new it all is to me, this perfect life; this perfect sympathy! I have never known it. The past does not hold it. As it dawns upon my darkened way—a possible, tangible joy—I am dazzled with its beauty and its brightness.

The future, as I ponder it here, alone in my sombre room, shines brighter and

brighter as I gaze. The new life upon which I have entered to-day unfolds itself before me. I see the days glide on, made perfect by that utter dependence of thought on thought, feeling on feeling; that quiet, every-day growth of nearness that gives to marriage its sacramental element, its special sanctity. To enjoy the good things of life together, to laugh at the droll things with a happy partnership in little jests all our own, which might seem stupid to other people, but which make us merry beyond all words; to let the sad things, and the heavy, weary days which must come sooner or later in all lives, only draw us nearer and nearer, since they have to be borne together.

"Darkness does but deepen love," when love is true, and deep, and pure.

I write like this, knowing that my darling's eyes will read the record word by word, and will like to know every thought of my heart.

I remember reading somewhere a pretty tale of two lovers who each kept a diary during their courting days, and on the day that they were wed, gave, each to the other, the journal of the past. And so it came about that in their after life, when any little jangling discord arose between them, each would remind the other of some sweet and tender thought recorded in those carefully-treasured heart-histories, and the cloud passed, and they "kissed again with tears."

Shall Mazie and I ever need such a talisman? I think not. Yet it pleases me to think that I will give her this, my journal, on our wedding-day; for I shall never need such record any more, never more be burdened with thought that can find no utterance, never more be sad or sorry, and lack a friend to tell it to.

My fancy is playing me strange tricks to-night. Strange and bewildering phantasies pass before my mind's eye.

It is our wedding-day; the tiny golden circlet that means so much is on your finger, Mazie, and you and I together are speeding across the land where all the cornfields are dressed in gold, bedecked with wealth of poppies, ripe and red. They look as if they are keeping festival for this, our marriage-morn—or so it seems to me. It is the time of hay carrying, and the air that comes in through the open carriage window is scented with the sweet, pungent hay.

My darling's hand lies restfully in mine; her dear eyes are soft and dreamy, full of

an uttermost content. There is a tremble round her mouth, as if the touch of my last kiss still thrilled and lingered there.

There is no one to come between us. We may be together always. We may take our fill of nearness.

We shall wander side by side through fairest scenes of Nature—that Nature which, like a vast book, is the full expression of the myriad-sided mind of God. We shall look upon everything with the same mind—see things with the same eye. It will be a happy, precious time, that short, sweet honeymoon of ours. Short it must be, for I may not leave my flock of black sheep for long. But then, fancy coming back to work with all my darling's never-failing sympathy to help me!

I should not wonder if some of our "bad cases" soften and resolve to strive after better things, under the influence of Mazie's gentle voice and passionate earnestness in winning souls to the love of right.

We shall have a little home of our own, I suppose, outside the prison walls; not far outside, though, or distance might be a hindrance.

I have never before fully entered into the feelings of the little woman on the King's highway, who is supposed to have uttered that plaintive song, "If this be I, as I suppose it be."

I suppose this is Louis Draycott, Prison Chaplain, writing up his diary, and feeling so unlike the "ego" that he has known for years past, and never known really glad at heart before, the man whose sole friend and confidant has been this book, so religiously kept under lock and key, so often hopelessly desolate in the spirit of its records.

It seems to me that I am a new man, and the "other man" has vanished—I know not whither!

Margaret, how hast thou been my good angel, leading me into that new and beautiful life, whose effulgence blinds me as I gaze! How hast thou won me from those terrible memories that, clinging about me, as sinuous weeds about the limbs of the swimmer, strove to drag me down into the depths of a morbid melancholy—an unfathomable despair!

With the touch of thy pure lips still lingering on mine, the love-light in thine eyes shining in my memory with pure and steadfast radiance, I raise my full heart to the Heaven that has so showered its choicest blessings on my long, solitary

path. I feel, I know, that in all this great city to-night there is no more grateful, thankful heart than mine.

It cannot be wondered that to me these precious hopes, these dear, delicious promises of joys to come are more infinitely dear than they could be to those who have a past to look back upon less black than mine. What of intensity have I ever known in life before? Of the pain of it—much. But of the passionate content of it—nothing!

Even writing of the past now, now in this high noon of joy into which Heaven has let me enter as into a sanctuary flooded with celestial light, even this light touching upon the days that are past is like tearing open a but half-healed wound. The bitterness, the degradation, the awful misery of it all, rises about me as from a grave; the pitiful daily and hourly effort to hide my shame and misery from those around me; the pity that I read in the eyes of some, breaking down my manhood and my pride, and laying them low in the dust; the agony of dread that the cause of the Master I served might be injured by the life I led; that the cause of Heaven and the right might suffer through the impatience and often bitterly rebellious fashion in which I bore that black and bitter cross laid on my weary shoulders—how it all comes back to me to-night! And no wonder; for to-night, as Dumphie and I together paced the quiet streets, we spoke of it, not openly, but in a veiled manner, and I said:

"You must come and see me, Dumphie, as you did last night, and we must have a talk together, not altogether like the last, for then the talking was on your side, and I took the part of listener. This time it will be for me to speak and you to listen. I want to tell you the story of my past life, keeping nothing back. It is right you should know all there is to know about me."

We were just under a lamp. Dumphie stopped short, took me by the lappel of my coat, and looked at me earnestly in the flickering light.

"I will listen to all you like to tell me," he said. "I will listen gladly, for everything about you has a deep interest for me. Still I should like to say now, I should like you to bear in mind afterwards, that I had said so before you told me a word—I have no fear that there is anything to hear that can shake my confidence one jot in Louis Draycott, or make me regret that I have

promised to give him the dearest thing I have on earth."

"There is nothing to make you regret that; there is nothing that would make me fear to ask Colonel Birt, if he stood alive here before us to-night, to trust the happiness of his daughter to my keeping. But there is much you ought to know—much better than I can tell Mazie. There have been many failures in my life, Dumphie; but nothing worse. Still, failure is bad enough, Heaven knows."

We were walking on together slowly, thoughtful, both of us; indeed, we spoke but little more until he bade me good-night and left me to go my way alone.

To-morrow night he will come, and I will tell him all.

It will hurt in the telling; but I can have no concealments with one himself so candid and fearlessly true.

If this journal of mine becomes for the future—I mean when Mazie is my wife—nothing more than a case-book; if all personal record becomes a thing of the past, and, even so, is only kept and cherished by my darling because it had been a part of me so long, I shall need no reminding of what these blessed days have brought. As the schoolboy cuts notches in a stick to mark the days that bring him nearer and nearer to his journey home, so on my heart is cut—and cut deep—the record of these happy weeks and months, full of new longings, new hopes, new fond desires and sweetness. Especially shall I remember, all my life to come, the month that is past; for, through it all, each day has brought me brighter hope, more firm conviction, that the heart of the woman I love is mine—that, by my comings and my goings, her gentle breast is stirred, her sympathy more and more vividly awakened in my life and work.

To-morrow will be May Day—happy time of festival, that ushers in the month of flowers. At three I am to be with Mazie . . . she will meet me with that radiant look that is more bright and beautiful than any I have seen on mortal face. I shall hold her close in my arms, and kiss the sweet lips that are so ready either to smile or tremble; that will always give me such true counsel, such precious words of comfort, such fond farewell, such tender greeting, even as my needs may be, for evermore. . . .

Four short months—and what a change in me, and in my life! I—who was so sure that Fate held in store for me nothing

fair, nothing precious—have found that all the sweetest gifts of life were garnered in her closed hand!

"For, lo! the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. . . . The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come."

The winter of desolation, the rain of tears, all past and gone, even as a tale that is told—even as a dream that is past.

But maybe, I had better not count upon to-morrow too much—for here is George to say that the warder wants me in the remand cell at once. A "bad case" was brought in this afternoon, and the said "case" has become unmanageable. I know, by long experience, what this sort of thing means. It means work—and plenty of it.

Well, well. Mazie is one of those grand and noble women who are always willing that a man's work for God in the world should come before everything—even themselves. I could not love her as I do—with heart, and mind, and soul, and strength—if it were not so.

END OF BOOK TWO.

OVER THE ROOF OF THE WORLD.

FRENCHMEN do travel, and to very out-of-the-way places. Herein, despite our close neighbourhood, we sometimes mistake the Frenchman's character, just as we do when we brand his nation—the most mathematical in the world—with frivolity. A French book of research is often far more satisfactory than a German one, because, while just as thorough, it is less imaginative. M. Bonvalot is one of those Frenchmen who are fond of going where scarcely anybody goes. He loves Central Asia (his taste is peculiar); and on his second visit he thought he would see what chance his Russian friends have of getting into India by a new route, over the Pamir plateau, which lies between Bokhara and Badakshan on the west, and Kashgar and Yarkand on the east.

It is not likely they will try. The Governor-General—after he had worked his way through the Kashmir valley, M. Bonvalot interviewed Lord Dufferin at Simla—has no need to be alarmed. No doubt the burglar sometimes gets in over the roof when the kitchen shutters are too strong for him, and there is no convenient

window on the first floor; but he doesn't try it in deep snow. And on the Pamir there is always snow enough to be embarrassing.

If the Hindoo Koosh between Balkh and Cabul is too much even for Russian enterprise, what of the much broader range, from Kokand round to Wakhan, over passes averaging nearly thirteen thousand feet, the thermometer varying (in April) from eighteen degrees below zero at ten p.m., to thirty degrees above zero in the shade at five p.m.? Noses bleeding, heads aching, ears singing, and a general sense of suffocation are only little discomforts for a tourist-party. But for an army they are a nuisance, especially when the horses suffer more from the nose-bleeding than the men. Of course one can imagine snow-ploughs, and galleries, and all the apparatus of the great American lines over the Rockies on a far greater scale. But the American line joins two parts of the same republic; a line across the Pamir would still have to deal with that higher barrier, the Hindoo Koosh, and then there would be the Kashmir valley to work through, with the Himalayas on its southern flank—altogether an unprofitable way of trying to come down on the plains of India.

Some day, however, and by some route or other, M. Bonvalot thinks the Russians will come down, to the delight of many discontented Hindoos. Between his two visits, the change which Russian occupation had wrought in what they have already annexed, struck him as marvellous. Slav gentleness and patience work wonders with the conquered people, while speed and organisation (Slav qualities likewise) are changing the aspect of what not many years ago was "independent Tartary," as rapidly as American "go ahead" is dotting the western prairies with new cities.

"The Russians," says M. Bonvalot, "are building up the Mogul empire backwards." And when one reads what he says about Persia, one cannot help wishing they would add that to their other conquests. Not a creditable set these Persians—drunken, beggar-ridden, their dances the obscenest, their lying the most outrageous in the world. Among the petty chiefs the worst vices of feudalism are in full play; the peasants are ground down in the most heartless manner, and naturally have become too lazy even to steal. It is all ripe for annexation already; a Governor's secretary took care to inform the Frenchmen that he was "a

Russian subject." And really people, who are too astonished to thank you when you pay your bill, and who are picking out the enamelled tiles from the beautiful cupolas at Veramine and elsewhere to sell to tourists, do not deserve to be under a Government of their own. Such a Shah, too, who, while his people are ruined with taxes, flings about in Europe like a drunken savage the money wrung from them.

Already the presence of the Russians at Merv has stopped the Turkomans, who used to do pretty nearly what they liked in the country, seeing that no one ever thought of resistance, and that the soldiers took care never to appear till the "enemy" was out of sight. Every field in Khorassan has its tower, like the "peel" on a Border farm, in which the farmer, with as much stock as he could stow away, would barricade himself as soon as a Turkoman appeared on the horizon. Now these towers are going to ruin. All along the heights were sentinels, watching for the long-legged horses with black-helmeted riders. "Save the flocks if you can; anyhow, save yourselves," was the watchword, for, fond as they were of other people's mutton, the Turkomans were fonder of good strong captives—they would sell better.

Often they would attack a caravan. A Persian told M. Bonvalot how, at a turn in the mountains, three hundred of them were set upon by fifty horsemen. That they should run seemed to him a thing to be not in the least ashamed of.

"Why, their horse-hoofs made a terrible clatter, and their sword-blades flashed, so that we had no heart left. Half were captured, and the robbers had their pick of the baggage. I crept into a karys, and when I came out I found others had done the same, and all that was left besides was the men who were too old to be worth carrying off, and the dead bodies that our pilgrims were carrying to be buried in holy ground, and our donkeys and their carts."

Lucky for him that there was a karys, that is, underground canal, close by. Such canals, covered in to prevent evaporation, were in use in Zoroaster's time. They are the only way of bringing the mountain springs down to the low ground. All along their course they have shafts for clearing out the earth that gets washed down; and to sit by one of these is like sitting by the gates of Paradise, while, to go down inside, into complete shade, with fresh water dancing by, is Paradise itself.

Russia cannot improve upon the karys, nor on the bargaining which makes an Eastern bazaar such a picture of confusion. M. Bonvalot tells of an Arab pilgrim and his wife chaffering for twopenny-worth of barley, at Nichapur. Of course the Persian dealer had mixed sand and stones with his corn, and managed to catch his foot in the scale and make it untrue.

But the Arab was a match for him. After any amount of harsh guttural shouting, his long arms flung wildly about through his burnous, he pulled out his purse and gravely counted the money. The coins were at once found to be bad, and the Arab, as angry as if the salesman had changed them by sleight of hand, at last counted out others one by one. But no sooner had he got his barley than, holding the bag with the gesture of a prophet in the wilderness, he said it was too light, and, proving the fact by a second weighing, insisted on his money being returned. Then off he went, muttering, and consoled himself for his loss of time by seizing, with a hawk's swoop, a lump of sugar from a tea-stall close by. How grand the old thief looked in his rags!

But the business was not over. He meant to have that barley; so up came his wife, so thin that her cheek-bones seemed coming through her mummy-like skin, and her shoulder-blades stuck out like planks under her dark homespun. She squatted down in front of the barley-sacks and turned the grain over with her bony fingers, munching a little every now and then. At last, after two or three false starts, the bargain was finished, the coins counted out—with the air of one who would say: "What a lucky man you are to get so much"—and off she stalked, like a gigantic stork, as majestic in her way as her husband.

These people enjoy the pilgrim life just as much as our forefathers did all Europe over in the Middle Ages. Any one who has once begun the life never gives it up; for, to a man who all his life has seen nothing but a Tartar or Syrian village, it must be as pleasant a change as globe-trotting is to one who is tired of Pall Mall and Bond Street. And then, the pilgrim never overdoes it, as the "tourist" so often does. Time is no object, and he lives almost as cheaply on the road as he would at home.

Persia is full of pilgrimage places. Meshed, where is buried the Imam Riza, the fifth from Ali, whom the Shiites specially reverence, is a holy city, par excellence, and very

unwholesome, too, for the whole place is one big cemetery—bodies from everywhere, even as far as the heart of lesser Asia, being sent there for burial—and, naturally, the water is full of organic matter.

That was M. Bonvalot's route. Landing at Batoum, which has already become such a thriving place that one forgets how unfairly Russia got hold of it, he pushed on through Persia to Merv. As he neared the frontier, he found that the Persians grew more and more bigoted. At one little town they came out like a swarm of ants, and attacked his native servant for "serving the infidel." The Frenchmen had to rescue him by a free use of their whips. One big fellow, stripped to the waist and wielding a huge club, had gone into religious convulsions, and gnashed his teeth and howled. He was reasonable enough, however, to respect the muzzle of a rifle brought pretty near to his head, and at last subsided with the rest. Nothing could be bought save by threats; and when the price was offered, "Throw it on the ground," the seller called out. "Why?" "Because it is unclean from your hands." And before picking it up the Persian rubbed his foot on the coins, so that the dust might take off their impurity.

At Sarakhs, the frontier, Russia begins. She has annexed the great sandy desert reaching, "like a true carpet of gratitude," as the Persians say, northward to Khiva, and eastward almost to Bokhara. The Russians did their best with the Tekke Turkomans. The most given to plundering they formed into a corps of guides. Other restless spirits are embodied as militia, and are delighted by being employed against their hereditary foes, the Afghans. All they now want is water for the land, which their conquerors insist on their tilling.

Daring their war with Russia, the Turkomans were very clever at rifle stealing. An old man, quite decrepit-looking, would painfully drag himself into the encampment, and after waiting for hours with the patience of a savage, would, when it got dark, take a gun off the pile under the sentry's very nose, and glide noiselessly away. A successful way of winning over Uzbek and Tartar chiefs of all kinds is to invite them to your capital and show them some grand fêtes. The Bey of Hissar told M. Bonvalot how he was at St. Petersburg when the Czar was crowned, and how nothing on earth was ever so splendid. We may be sure he was not sent to a third-rate hotel,

and made to pay his own bill. "The true Shah in Shah (King of Kings)," said he, "is not he of Persia, but the White Czar." This same Bey would show the travellers the wonderful fortress of Karatag, "built in one night at the earnest prayer of a saint." Its recent history has not been saintly. Its owner, an Uzbek of old family, named Abdul-Kerim, thought he could rebel against the Emir of Bokhara; but he was conquered, and the Emir, to prevent similar risings, had a thousand heads chopped off and stuck all round the battlements of Karatag. The Emir looks, in Mr. Pepin's sketch, a benignly handsome man; but his subjects must be glad to have exchanged his rule for that of Russia. The splendid rooms of the castle are almost as when their last lord was living in them. Indeed, that is the second castle empty, but not in ruins, which M. Bonvalot found in Bokhara. And it seemed very strange to be wandering freely through harem and bath-room and audience-hall, just as if it was a European show-house.

Soon after this came a great disappointment. At Tchour-Tepe, not far from Balkh, the party was firmly, but decidedly stopped. "No one," said the officers of the Afghan outpost, "can cross the Oxus unless he has a written order from the Emir." M. Bonvalot's Persian firman was useless; equally useless was his assertion that he was neither Russian nor English, but French.

Turned back, at Tchour-Tepe, from what was the direct route, via Balkh and Cabul, to India, M. Bonvalot has the Pamir route put into his head on his return to Samarcand, by his old friend General Karalkoff.

"Winter's the best time," says the General, "for there'll be no robbers about, nor any Chinese scouts. If you find the Alai range—where there will be the deepest snow—impassable, you can go round by Kashgar and Yarkand to Ladak, and so across the passes of the Karakorum."

So, on the fourteenth of January, the Frenchmen sledged away from Samarcand, passing "the seven cities" which Alexander captured, and pushing on from Khodjend to Khokand. At Marguilane they decided on trying the route by the Taldik, thence to the Pass of Kizil Art, skirting the Lake of Kara Kul, and out through the Pass of Kara Art by the head waters of the Oxus. This seemed the likeliest way of avoiding the Afghan Scylla on the one

hand and the Chinese Charybdis on the other.

Anybody who intends going such a road should read M. Bonvalot's elaborate preparations. Presents, a plated Winchester rifle for the Khan of Kunjut, on the Indian border; silk sashes, looking-glasses, ear-rings, etc., to give away; arms in case they are wanted; sugar, salt, cloth bearing the Chinese customs' stamp; silver bars, cut up in trading just as you cut a stick of liquorice; bladdered mutton, which keeps as well as tinned, and is far more palatable; bread for a month; sixty pounds of dried apricots; horse clothing of double felt; and a ton of barley—such a temptation that, no wonder, some of the Kirghis decamped with a good quantity of it.

Besides all this they had to take a good deal of fuel to supplement the wild-sheep-droppings, which are the staple in those parts where even juniper-bush roots fail.

At last, on the sixteenth of March, they got under way. Three Frenchmen, a faithful Circassian—who had been with them throughout—a Bokhara man, and three others, dressed in proper marching costume—stockings of Kashgar felt, boots of ditto drawn over the leather boots, leather trousers over the thick-lined cloth ones, two pelisses, one of sheep-skin, and over the sheep-skin cap a ditto hood, which will draw over head and face, leaving two eye-holes, which the more provident of the party lightly fill with horsehair wads. Such figures of fun they look in M. Pepin's sketches—the guns slung over their shoulders, packed in double sheep-skin cases!

For these eight there are twenty horses; but, besides, a score of Kirghis with fifty horses help to get them and their baggage on to the Pamir, where the sweeping wind prevents the snow from being so deep. So it was quite a little army, and the story reads like what Livy says of Hannibal crossing the Alps—horses tumbling about and getting up to their ears in snow, men floundering up to their waists in big drifts, packs shifting and having to be unloaded, the ice on the ropes making untidy a sorry business.

No wonder, when a halt is called, nearly everybody is half blind, and almost suffocated. One man lies on his back close to his horse, which has fallen on its side; another has fallen asleep as he rests his head against his saddle; a third is holding

on by the tail, and whipping his poor beast that has fallen into a hole. Fortunately, there were no glaciers to cross, and therefore no crevasses; but six weeks of pounding along through boulder-stone passes, one more than fifteen thousand seven hundred feet above the sea level, with the mercury now and then frozen, and a fire sometimes taking an hour to light, was enough, without the addition of Alpine dangers. The wind was as much as human nature could bear; and frequently snow came with it. Indeed, instead of grumbling at the Kirghis for wanting to desert, M. Bonvalot might have asked himself whether a score of Europeans could have been got to go through half as much. They are not handsome-looking, these Kirghis; but really, on the whole, they behaved very well, though they knew that, were the Chinese to find out what was going on, they would be put to death for aiding the travellers. Once our Frenchmen had a narrow escape of being handed over to the Mandarins, and perhaps put in a cage and sent up to headquarters. The man who saved them, and gave them confidence—they had got very low-spirited—and piloted them through a blizzard, and guided their horses over the shoulder of a precipice, where steps had to be cut for them in the ice, and four men told off to each to keep it from slipping—this godsend of a guide they met with by pure accident. His son-in-law had spied them, and brought a sheep for sale, and, as their guide had decamped, they were glad indeed to accept the stranger's offer. It was about time; threats had become useless with the Kirghis baggage-men. M. Bonvalot tried blows, but one poor fellow laid down, and vowed he would kill himself if he was touched.

The new man was not only a clever guide, but also a saint—very useful for encouraging the recreants. He had been a great ruffian—the Pamir, being a no-man's land, is a sort of Alsatia—but, dreaming he was at night in a raging river, the torrent sucking him down to an abyss, and the shore receding every time he rose to the surface, he took warning, began to say "the five prayers" day by day; took up the dervish's staff; and every year makes a pilgrimage to Khodjend to listen to readings out of the holy books.

In his own tribe he at once became the great peacemaker and arbitrator, besides praying for sick and newly-born. And his faithfulness to M. Bonvalot was some-

thing touching. When some horsemen wanted to turn the party back on pain of displeasing His Imperial Majesty, the Chinese Emperor, the dervish-guide said :

"Yes, I know I'm risking my life. The Chinese are cruel, but I'm not afraid of them. I'm only afraid of doing what's wrong. Allah!"

Of course nearly all the horses died, and the Kirghis dribbled away, and had to be replaced by others who would not stir a yard without being paid beforehand. No wonder, when a man sees a few miles ahead a white wall, over which these strange Feringhis invite him to make his way, and convey their baggage, he says, "Bismillah," being a Mahometan; but, being a man also, he looks about for some way of escape. What kept the party alive was the good humour consequent on their always sleeping like tops, in the fine, dry, frosty air. The Circassian, too, always had a song for the bivouac, and the Bokhara man was an unwearied storyteller, telling the old tale of Iskander and Dara (Alexander and Darius), and how "when Dara was a-dying he laid his head on Iskander's knees and prayed: 'Treat my family well, and kill them that have killed me;' and how Iskander conquered the five parts of the world, and married the Emperor of Tsin's (China's) daughter, and with his lance killed fishes that had bars of gold in their stomachs." Then there was always plenty of tea and millet porridge; and sometimes they shot an arker (wild sheep). And a few Kirghis were met now and again with their yaks—"all hair and no legs." The Circassian insisted on riding one—and a comical figure he looked—and sometimes a camel (we do not think of camels as living on the snow-line as comfortably as in the desert). At last they got to Wakhan and through the Hindoo Koosh, with birch and willow trees and grass here and there, instead of the wormwood of which their horses had been so glad on the Pamir.

But he had gone through all this, this eccentric Frenchman, only to be stopped once more, and by the same Affghans who turned him back at Tchour-Tepe. He had got as far as Tchattral, and Peshawur was almost within reach, when a peremptory chief said they must not go on without an order from the Governor-General. This was on the eighteenth of May, and it was more than seven weeks before Lord Dufferin's permit came, along with a letter saying that all had been done to make their way

as smooth as possible. Fortunately, time seems to have been no object, though one cannot help thinking the game was hardly worth the candle. Time passed pleasantly enough. Despite their ragged garments, the Frenchmen managed to make the Affghans think a good deal of them; their two dogs, trained to bite the calves of all intruders, helped to make them respected. The Bokhara man alone grumbled sadly:

"Why don't you kill a chief," said he, "steal his horses, and let us ride on at full speed, changing horses whenever we have the chance, and hamstringing any that might be used to pursue us?"

M. Bonvalot calmed him by telling him La Fontaine's fables, which, having come originally from the Far East, may thus be said to have made the round of the world.

In Kashmir, when at last they were allowed to go forward, they found French friends and very good Burgundy. Then there was the ceremonial visit of thanks to Simla; and then homeward from Kur-rachee to Port Said.

It was a weary trip, and one fancies it must have cost many bars of silver to satisfy those Kirghis; and then one asks: "What was the good of it?" I cannot find that M. Bonvalot gathered any specimens, or made any scientific observations beyond taking the temperature. It was too cold for that sort of thing; how M. Pepin managed to take his sketches is a puzzle. One thing the travellers found—that, except mountain ranges, there is little or nothing to be seen. The "Roof of the World" seems, after all, a dull place, on which no one would care to stay longer than is absolutely necessary.

But M. Bonvalot's book is amusing; he jokes in season and out of season. Sometimes the grave Orientals were scandalised at him; but there is a deal of fun in a Tartar when you know how to get at it. Perhaps the best joke in the book is when his invaluable Circassian—who went the whole round with him to Port Said—gave five roubles to a quack to cure his horse, the recipe being: "Strip yourself stark naked, take the horse by the tail, kick him thrice on the quarter, and then recite after me a prayer my grandfather taught me, and that no one else in the world knows." The fun of it is, that the horse, which was in a dying state, got better!

Naturally, M. Bonvalot does not love the Affghans. They are, he found, great boasters. They hate the English and the

Russians; but they fear the latter. "But for them," they say, "we would soon have annexed Bokhara, and pushed our conquests on to Siberia; while, on the other side, it is only Russia that has kept us from conquering Persia. The Russians are poor; but they have multitudes of soldiers. The English are made of money; why, a Colonel of theirs gets six thousand rupees a month." Afghan feeling, even as it came under M. Bonvalot's notice, is worth taking account of.

THE SWALLOW.

No member of the feathered tribes is more popular with us than the swallow; nor do we stand alone in this respect, for all the world over, swallows are favoured by man. The savage Indian, even, welcomes them, and provides a receptacle for their nests. The Choctaws and Chicashaws cut off all the top branches from some small tree near their cabins, leaving prongs a foot or two in length, in each of which they hang a gourd, properly hollowed out for the convenience of the birds; and the wild tribes who dwell along the banks of the Mississippi provide for them in a similar fashion. Wherever they are found, swallows frequent, rather than shun, places occupied by man; and the reason for this may be found in the greater abundance of insects in such localities.

Superstitious people think that dire misfortunes are in store for the reckless mortal who kills a swallow or destroys its nest. This idea probably arose from the breach of hospitality involved in the destruction of a bird which shelters itself beneath our very roof. On the other hand, good luck is supposed to be in store for the inmates of the house which swallows choose for their home; and, in days gone by, there was held to be no surer sign of impending ill-luck than their desertion of a house on which they had once built their nests. The association of misfortune with the wilful destruction of swallows can be traced to the earliest times. We learn from Ælian that the ancients considered them sacred to the Penates, or household gods; their preservation, therefore, became a matter of religious concern, and whoever injured one was held to insult the deity to whom it was consecrated.

The Rhodians had a solemn anniversary song, which they used to chant by way of

welcoming these birds, which they looked upon as harbingers of spring. Anacreon's "Ode to the Swallow" is too well known to call for any but a passing allusion. That the ancient soothsayers looked upon swallows as one of their chief means of divination is, perhaps, not known to the majority of readers of the classics, but in an old book emphasis is laid upon this fact. We are told that, "by swallows lighting upon Pirrhos' tents, and lighting upon the masts of Mar. Antonius' ship saying after Cleopatra to Egypt, the soothsayers did prognosticate that Pirrhos should be slain at Argos in Greece, and Mar. Antonius in Egypt." We read further that swallows followed King Cyrus, going with his army from Persia to Scythia, as ravens followed Alexander the Great on his return from India, and on his way to Babylon. And even as the Magi told the Persians that Cyrus should die in Scythia, so the Chaldean astrologers informed the Macedonians that their King should die in Babylon, "without any further warrant but by the above swallows and ravens."

In some parts of the country swallows are looked upon as forerunners of death. A correspondent of "Notes and Queries," on visiting the sick child of a poor woman, had the following remark made to her by the child's mother:

"A swallow lit upon her shoulder, ma'am, a short time since, as she was walking home from church, and that is a sure sign of death."

This is a scarcely more complimentary view to take of the bird than that which is common in some districts of Ireland, where it is anything but a favourite, for the poor people call it "the devil's bird," from a strange belief that on every one's head is a particular hair, which, if a swallow can pluck it off, dooms the wretched individual to eternal perdition.

Belgian peasants believe that where the swallow settles lightning will never fall; and that, when autumn comes, it forms itself into a ball and passes in some mysterious way under the sea to warmer climes.

Russian peasants think that it is the bearer of warmth from Paradise to the earth; they believe that its presence keeps off fire and lightning, that its early arrival foretells an abundant harvest, and that permanent freckles will appear all over the face of any one who robs its nest.

Another superstition tells how young swallows lose their sight a few days after

they are hatched, and how the parent birds fly off to distant lands and bring back in their beaks a certain marvellous stone, with which they touch the eyes of their young ones, with the result that sight is restored to them again. Longfellow refers to this legend in "Evangeline," when he says :

Seeking with eager eyes that wondrous stone, which
the swallow
Brings from the shore of the sea to restore the sight
of its fledglings.

Norway and Sweden are not too far north for the swallow to find its way to them ; and the Scandinavians have a legend that this bird hovered over the Cross, singing, "Svate! svate!" (cheer up! cheer up!), and hence it was given the name of Svate, or Swallow—"the bird of consolation."

The Germans are always very anxious that their houses should be selected by swallows to build upon, for they think that the bird's presence preserves the house they select from all danger by fire or storm, and, indeed, from every kind of evil.

Some days before swallows leave us, they assemble together, usually beside a river, where they wait for fresh arrivals, till a flock of many thousands is collected. Did we not know that similar gatherings were going on in many other places, we could well imagine that every swallow in the kingdom was in this particular spot.

At Rotherham, in 1815, it was firmly believed that this was the case. Early in September a wonderful assemblage of the birds commenced ; their numbers kept on increasing day by day, until myriads upon myriads of them were collected. They roosted in some willows, and at about six o'clock every morning, rose from these in four, five, or six great divisions, each of which flew off, taking a different route from the rest, not only, it was supposed, in order that they might be distributed equally to search for food, but also to gather in any stragglers that they might encounter. In the evening they would return from every quarter of the compass, reaching the willows some as early as five o'clock ; some not until the sun had set. This went on till the seventh of October, when the whole vast army rose in one mass, and winged its way south. Probably they would have left sooner, but, for some days previous to their departure, there had been a contrary wind ; as soon

as this changed they took advantage of it and went.

There are several other accounts of extraordinarily large gatherings of these birds at the beginning of the century ; and the fact that we never hear of them nowadays as reaching such immense proportions, is one of the principal grounds for the assertion made by many naturalists, that swallows do not visit our shores in nearly such large numbers as used to be the case.

The winter retreat of swallows has been a subject that has attracted attention in all ages. It has been supposed by some that on the approach of cold weather they retire to the inmost recesses of rocks, mountains, or decayed trees, and there lie torpid until the return of spring rouses them to active life again. There is just enough foundation for this idea to enable us to understand its prevalence in former times.

Solitary swallows have been observed long after their fellows have left our shores ; and again, a few birds sometimes appear long before the regular immigration has commenced. These are no doubt members of second broods, which were hatched so late in the season that they had not sufficient strength of wing to fly off with their fellows. They lie torpid in some sheltered spot, and an unusually warm, bright day in late autumn or early spring will bring them out. Several have been found together, nestling under the thatch in a barn ; and it is these isolated cases which led men to believe that all swallows remained with us in a torpid state through the winter.

Gilbert White was a supporter of this theory. He says that swallows "Do not depart from this island ; but lay themselves up in holes and caverns ; and do, insect-like and bat-like, come forth at mild times, and then retire again to their 'latebræ.'" A far more extraordinary hypothesis than this is that of the "subaqueous hybernation" of these birds during the winter. It is difficult to understand how any but the most ignorant persons could bring themselves to believe in such an absolutely impossible idea ; and yet many naturalists have given it their support ; amongst them Klein and Linnæus. Indeed, the belief that swallows pass the winter at the bottom of ponds or rivers, is still prevalent in some out-of-the-way parts of England. In support of the theory, Bishop Stanley, in his "History of Birds," mentions the following fact :

"On the second of November, 1829, at Lock Ransa, in the island of Arran, a man, whilst digging in a place where a pond had been drained off, discovered two swallows in a state of torpor. On placing them near a fire, they recovered."

It is most likely that these birds had been left behind, and had found their way into some partially-concealed hole after the pond was drained. Most latter-day writers on birds treat the idea of hibernation under water as being too extravagant to need serious refutation. The Rev. Mr. Fleming, however, brings forward several unanswerable arguments to disprove it. He says that swallows are much lighter than water, and could not, therefore, sink in clusters as they are represented to do; and asks, if their feathers are previously wetted to destroy their buoyant power, in what manner can they resist the decomposing effect of six months' maceration in water, and appear in spring as fresh and glossy as those of other birds?

Swallows do not moult while they remain with us in an active state; so, if they submerge, they either do not moult at all, or they perform the process under water. In the case of other torpid animals, some vital actions are performed, and a portion of oxygen is consumed; but in the case of submerged swallows, respiration, and consequently circulation, must cease. Other animals, too, in retiring for their winter slumbers, consult safety; while the swallows, in sinking under the water, select the place where the otter and the pike commit their depredations.

We can easily imagine, however, that some stories of fishermen having drawn living swallows from rivers in their nets are perfectly true. Towards the middle of autumn swallows frequently roost at the edges of rivers. It is quite likely that they might settle for the night on the bank of a shallow and muddy river at low tide, and that they should be induced by cold to creep among the reeds that are partially covered by the water when the tide is up. In such a case, it is not difficult to conceive them caught by the water, and swept away into the stream.

Fishermen naturally go out to catch fish on the incoming of the tide, and there is nothing wonderful in the fact that they should draw in some half-dead swallows with their nets. Still, as one swallow does not make a summer, so a few cases of this sort cannot establish the theory of

hibernation beneath the water. As a matter of fact, the majority of the swallows which flit over our streams and meadows during the warmer months, wing their way to Africa when the shortening days and chilly nights warn them that it is time to seek some more genial clime. A few swallows winter in the oases which are scattered about the northern edge of the Great Desert; but the main body of migrants from the shores of these islands extend their journey considerably beyond this point. At Sierra Leone and on the River Senegal, swallows abound at all seasons of the year; but from May to October they are far less plentiful there, showing that a large contingent of them has flown northwards. Mr. Yarrell tells us that in January and February, swallows are to be seen on the West Coast of Africa as far south as the island of St. Thomas, on the Equator. Natal becomes alive with these birds in November, and is deserted by them again in March and April. After Africa, the favourite winter resort of our swallows seems to be the North-West Provinces of India, where they are found in considerable numbers during the months in which fog and frost reign over the British Isles.

Swallows were formerly used extensively in medicine. In an old work, entitled "A Book of Knowledge," is given the remedy for "the sinews that are shrunk in the thighs or elsewhere," which consists of twelve young swallows pounded up with rosemary, bay leaves, lavender, strawberry leaves, and hog's grease. This mixture was to be set in the sun for the space of a month, then boiled, and strained, and the ointment kept. It was in this that the virtue lay; and with it patients are told to "anoint the place grieved, and with God's blessing it will do much good."

The efficacy of swallows in remedial ways is very highly spoken of in a medical book published in 1654, in which one Nicholas Culpepper, "Student of Physick and Astrology," tells us that, "Swallows, being eaten, clear the sight; the ashes of them (being burnt), eaten, preserve from drunkenness, help sore throats, being applied to them, and inflammation." Many popular works on medicine, published long after Culpepper's time, give similar recipes. In conclusion, we may notice the curious fact that swallows, which we naturally associate with ideas of spring, are almost invariably alluded to by our poets in connection with summer.

THE DUMB SPEAKS.

LOOK on us two, I pray you—her and me—
 The woman sitting where the flickering gleams
 Of firelight fall upon her face and hair;
 I in the window, shrouded in the gloom
 That creeps on slowly with the dying day.
 You can just trace my features, common, pale,
 Like many others that you daily see,
 But look at her! Even the fickle flame
 Pauses, and holds its quivering breath at times,
 As though it longed to linger lovingly
 Over the wealth of beauty it reveals.
 See—you can watch her from the window here,
 Where many a night I watch her as she dreams
 In the grey twilight, with no thought of me
 (Unless she dreams that I am dreaming too);
 But here I crouch and scan that perfect face;
 Read all the changing thoughts that come and go,
 Playing like summer lightning in her eyes,
 Waking the dimpled curves about the mouth,
 Now grave, now gay—as visions rise and fall.
 And when each night he comes—whose very step
 Sends through my frame a sudden, nameless thrill,
 While all my heart burns in a still white flame,
 And all my being grows one silent cry
 For just one look to slake my raging thirst—
 One word to still the craving hunger here—
 I know how she will lift those languorous lids,
 Sweeping their silken fringe up to unveil
 A soft, slow smile of greeting—while he reads
 Deep in the still, grey, dreamy mystery
 All that we other women—commonplace—
 Might yearn and struggle all our lives to speak
 In piteous, mute impotence—yea, all
 My closed lips must not—my eyes cannot say.

How should I blame him? Who would bear the
 weed

Set in his heart, when he might wear the rose?
 Who but would still the feeble sparrow-chirp
 To hear the golden-throated nightingale?
 Though both the birds would speak the self-same
 thing.

And every man sees heaven, once a life
 Dawn through the firmament of woman's eyes—
 Revealing worlds unknown to him before
 And bathing all things in a great new light—
 A tide of wondrous possibilities
 Of love, and strength, and joy, where self is not—
 And would I dim that vision's perfectness
 Or blot it from the sight of him I love
 Because my own hand could not lift the veil?
 No! though that woman's face for evermore
 Closes the door of earthly love on me,
 I glory in its beauty all the same;
 I would not mar one of those faultless lines
 Nor pale one tint of all its loveliness—
 It is not hers alone who wears the face,
 It is a voice to speak for all her kind.
 Have there not always been, from age to age,
 Some here and there (though few and far between)
 Graced with the heaven-born, mighty power to
 speak

What all the rest could only dumbly feel?
 The painter on his canvas shadows forth
 Some echo of the glories we have seen
 In waking dreams, of colour and of form,
 The ideal beauty after which we pine
 That floats for evermore before our eyes.
 Hear the musician striving to express
 The world-wide cry for perfect harmony,
 The strange pathetic, yearning hopes and fears
 That heave and moan deep in the heart of man!
 Fain would the Poet speak the mighty thoughts,
 The wordless aspirations after truth,
 That lift our nature almost up to Heaven—
 Yet must these need be partial—they who speak
 Are only little parts of one great whole;
 Can only whisper faintly, separately,
 Each but a note half heard—a light half seen.

God's gift to beauty is the power to speak
 Where art is lifeless—even music dumb;
 Look in her face! all are concentrated there,
 Colour, and rhythm, yea, and harmony—
 Just as the sevenfold mighty tints of heaven
 Are gathered up and shine forth uniform
 In the pure light of day.

This is God's voice—
 This the Great Artist's visible Ideal
 Revealed in living faultlessness of line
 And perfect colour, and fair light and shade—
 The One Musician's soul of harmony,
 In silence speaking that which sound would mar—
 The Most High Poet's idyll in a word—
 And all who will may see, and hear, and know.

I will be glad, then, since the word is spoke,
 Rejoicing that it finds so fair a voice—
 And still the wail that rises in my heart
 Crying "Yet I am dumb!"

I hear his step!
 Look! though the firelight burns so dim and low,
 I see him, as I see him every night,
 Bend down to read my secret in her eyes,
 To watch my love play on her perfect lips,
 To feel my heart beat in her snowy breast—
 And he is satisfied—he hears the word—
 What though he cannot know the voice? I speak,
 Albeit I am dumb!

ANNORA.

A COMPLETE STORY.

It is an odd story, and a terrible one;
 but absolutely true. I knew Annora
 Masters; I have stood by her grave often,
 and thought how little we know of life or
 of each other.

I have studied character a good deal.
 I am a novelist, so it has become like
 second nature to me to analyse motives
 and actions. It has been so through a
 long life. The habit has only strengthened
 with added years; but in Annora I studied
 nothing; could study nothing.

A country town is a very good place
 for gaining and adding to knowledge of
 that sort. The inhabitants, to an extent
 hardly realised by people who do not
 know them, live in common; I mean,
 they have all known each other and each
 other's faults and failings since they were
 children together; and the feelings formed
 then, and the keen interest in each other's
 affairs, last on through middle age and the
 downhill part of life.

Every one knew Lucy Cherry. Every
 one in the town liked her. Most of the
 young fellows—I was young then, and
 one of them—did more than like her.

When she came into church on Sunday
 mornings, a look of agonised expectation
 would come over about thirty faces in the
 congregation. They all gazed eagerly at
 Lucy in the hope of one glance from her
 as she went up the very short part of the
 aisle leading to the square pew where the

Cherrys sat. Square pews were not gone then. A great mistake it was, surely, that they ever did go. Sleep during the sermon is what most of us secretly wish for. Under the new arrangement, though, who is bold enough to take it?

Lucy would sometimes look up—not often—during those moments of her quick walk behind her brother. On whichever side of the aisle her glance fell, radiant faces were visible; on the other side a proportionate despair showed itself. Had they not been in a place where private sentiments are rarely manifested, the relations between those gentlemen would instantly have become extremely "strained."

It was not to be wondered at. Lucy was very pretty. Brown hair—just the sort which most becomes a woman—soft and wavy; blue, dark-blue, eyes; and a tall figure, straight and upright as an arrow. It is neither here nor there to say that I never saw a woman like her; and had I ever married—but how could I, when she never even gave a thought to me? Still, the fact intensified my feelings afterwards, when—but, evidently, even the practice I have had is not able to hinder me from telling this story confusedly, unless I take care. Well, I am growing old, and it was terrible. I do not half like the task I have set myself.

One Sunday came, when both sides of the aisle showed only disconsolate countenances. Lucy looked neither on one side nor the other. She looked on the ground to hide a very pretty blush, and then fixedly on her brother's broad shoulders, as he, good soul, walked in front, thinking of nothing less than his sister.

She was engaged to be married—we had all heard it in the week—to a doctor, who had recently bought a practice in the town. He had many friends, and few enemies, and was decidedly popular. Clever, he was most certainly; strikingly handsome; and so pleasant to talk with, that every one who met him did stop and talk to him.

This is a man's praise of a man, so it is not likely to be overdone, and it is hardly likely that I should have any reason for overpraising the man who won the only girl I ever cared for.

No; I did not wonder at Lucy. No one did. And they looked so well together—she so sweet and womanly, he so thoroughly manly, and yet so gentle, to give the

much-abused compound word its real force.

Lucy, perhaps in mercy to us—perhaps to him—was content with only six weeks' engagement, and their wedding was fixed for New Year's Day.

The weather that winter was unusually cold and dreary, and on the last day of the old year there was a terrible snow-storm, which lasted all day, and only ended just in time to let the clouds roll away from a fiery red sunset. New people came to the town in the middle of the snow-storm, people who had recently taken one of the few large red-brick houses the town possessed—a really large house, standing in its own large, old-fashioned garden. But every one who knew her—and that was all the town—was so taken up with thinking of Lucy's wedding, that no one bestowed a thought at the time on what would at any other have been a great excitement—the arrival of the new tenants, Annora Masters and her husband. I use the words advisedly, for those two names could go in no other order.

Not until next morning when I, with several of my friends, who hardly felt it their happiest day of life, stood in church, watching Lucy's sweet face and her husband's handsome, manly figure, did I ever think of the new people.

And then I thought of them, because, among the crowd in the body of the church, I saw a woman whose face haunts me—will haunt me till nothing earthly can trouble me longer. Tall, dark; dressed entirely in black, with black hair, and eyes which even through her veil burned with a flashing sort of light. If it had not been impossible to look at Annora Masters for more than an instant, I should have been able to know certainly if there was really a dull red light in them, as I fancied, like glowing fires in her white face.

She stood among a quantity of townspeople; but, after I had looked at her, it seemed that no one else but Lucy and the tall, dark woman was in the church. She was watching Lucy with those eyes, and I thought, I fancied, that everything lovely and bridal about Lucy seemed for that moment an ashen grey.

Then Lucy passed out of the door into the snow, which fell fast on her veil. I came out, too, and followed at a distance, and as Annora Masters went up the High Street and in at the garden door of the long untenanted house, I

knew that I must have seen the new tenant.

The townspeople called on Annora Masters. Every one said the same thing, or, rather, no one gave any opinion of her, and only, when pressed, said:

"She is strange, don't you think?"

Annora returned none of the calls but Lucy's; and was only seen at church, where she appeared with a regularity which was part of her strangeness, it struck me—so utterly out of place did she look there. I cannot say why; no one could; but the woman was awful, in an utterly indefinable manner, and peace and goodness seemed at odds with everything about her. Of her household and house-keeping no one knew anything. Servants they had brought with them—two plain, middle-aged women. Her husband we saw beside her when she went out on Sundays. And he went up to London—a journey of only twenty miles—every day. He was supposed to be that indefinable individual, a "business man." At least, he went to London every day, till the day we were all shocked and startled by hearing that Mr. Masters was dead.

Yes—dead—suddenly. Lucy's husband went to see him. A London doctor came down, and together they carried out the post-mortem examination, which was of course insisted on, and to which Annora made not the least objection. They could find nothing, nothing whatever, to cause death. All was right; there was no latent disease, no injury. The man we had seen alive and well on Sunday was dead on Tuesday—that was all.

"From unknown causes," the verdict at the inquest ran.

Lucy, in her kindness, went to see Annora Masters after this. "To comfort her," she said. But apparently Annora would have no comfort. For Lucy, whom I met a few days later, asked me seriously if I had ever seen Annora Masters close; if I—lowering her voice—thought she was mad.

She had, Lucy said, grasped her wrists tightly, and said, when Lucy tried to say some of the words her own sweet heart taught her:

"Death! Sometimes death brings one what one wants! It is life that is wrong."

Then she broke off suddenly; and, dropping Lucy's hands, begged her to come and see her again.

"The oddest thing," Lucy went on, "is that Harry is sure he has seen Mrs. Masters before somewhere, and can't remember where. He hates her," Lucy said, very low. "I don't—quite like her. She——"

"You couldn't, my——"

I had forgotten, I sometimes did, that Lucy was not my darling. The thought was often bad to bear, so I lifted my hat and left her abruptly.

One warm spring day, three months later, I was passing the old red-brick house, when one of the maid-servants rushed out hastily, nearly knocking me down.

"Oh!" she cried, "come in, sir, do, while I go for the doctor. Jane's fainted, and mistress, she does nothing but stand looking at Mrs. Bent, and doing nothing to bring her round. Do make her, sir, for mercy's sake!"

"Mrs. Bent!" I said, grasping the woman's arm like a vice. "What is it? Tell me!"

"She's fainted, sir, and I can't get her round, and mistress—there, sir, let me go."

I did let her go, rushed up the garden, and unceremoniously indoors and upstairs, into a large room where I saw—what I can see now—Lucy, white, ashen white, lying motionless on the dark rug, and Annora Masters standing by the mantelpiece, with one arm resting on it, gazing on the woman at her feet.

I don't know what I did—seized Annora's arm, I think. Still less do I know what I said—words of intense hate and burning anger, I know—but when she turned slowly and, with a slow, contemptuous smile on her lips, looked at me, the flashing red light in her eyes turned me to silence. I had no more words.

I, whose love, whose passion lay dead there, could say no more, could not speak!

I knelt down by Lucy, and hid my face in my hands. Something so surely made me know that Lucy was dead—gone beyond power of our help—that I never tried to touch or raise the white marble face. And then—I do not remember anything else.

I was ill, very ill, for a long time after that. When I got well I asked, of course, before anything, about Lucy. Gone, I knew she was; but when and how?

Heart disease, they said. Heart disease ! My darling !

I got strong again slowly — a most annoying thing for an active man, and I could not believe in my own weakness.

Perhaps my nerves were overstrung and my perceptions unreliable, one night, when I had in a sort of bravado walked much farther than I was really able. What am I saying ? Overstrung nerves ! Nonsense ! I saw them.

I was passing an old ruin—Saint Anne's Chapel we called it. It was gaunt and uncanny in the winter moonlight, which shone with an unearthly sort of radiance over everything. Suddenly I saw, clear and bright, in front of the falling, ruined window, two figures — figures I felt I knew. With a sudden impulse I went back into the shadow and watched. All at once I knew. The tall, slender, black-robed woman was Annora Masters. Even at that distance I could see the light in those awful eyes.

The other, a man whose attitude somehow seemed to me to show reluctance in every line, upright and firm though he stood, was—Lucy's husband. Lucy's husband ! I cast every thought of eavesdropping to the winds—was I not, after all, on the King's highway ?—and listened.

"You will," Annora said. "You do ; I knew you before this — this ridiculously short life." And she laughed more weirdly than words can say.

"I—Lucy was my wife, my love. I love her still," he answered, in an odd, choked voice.

"You love—me !" the cold, calm, incisive voice answered.

And I saw it. But when I think of it, after all these years, the same shudder comes over me that I felt then. Then she looked at him. He took her into his arms—the arms that had held Lucy.

I could bear no more. I never knew how I got home. All the way the thought followed, accompanied, haunted me. What was this ? Who was this who threw everything aside in this awful way, and went straight to her own ends ? Was it a woman—or a fiend ?

No one ever knew more than this. How should they ?

A room at the back of the red-brick house, in which Annora often sat, was found one morning locked from the inside. The servants were alarmed. Doubly

so, when they found that their mistress's own room had never been entered that night.

They sent for help to force the door, and found, in an arm-chair close to the window, Lucy's husband—dead—shot through the head. A pistol lay on the floor. From its position it must have fallen from his own right hand, which hung over the chair.

He was alone ; the window was shut, but not fastened, and there was no sign or trace of Annora.

A small crumpled note lay on the floor. It was in his writing, and contained very few lines.

"I am writing this at home," it ran, "to tell you I cannot come ; but what use is it ? I know I shall come as surely as ten o'clock strikes. You will make me. But—marry you ! I would kill myself first."

Annora no one ever saw again ; till, three years ago, one evening, late, in the winter moonlight, on his grave—we buried him by Lucy—I, coming home, saw a woman's figure lying. I went up to it hastily, and found what had been Annora.

JACQUES BONHOMME :

THE BOY.

"BORN in the garret, in the kitchen bred"—Byron's beginning of his bitter biography of his Lady's maid and confidante—would by no means suit my present hero, for the very good reason that his father's cottage—I might say his paternal "manoir"—has neither kitchen nor garret, properly speaking. It is a low, no-storied habitation—so low indeed that it can hardly be called an erection—with something of the compendiousness of the cobbler's stall, which served him for parlour and kitchen and all.

Whatever enlargement it may be able to make, in whatever direction it may be tempted to extend itself when times are prosperous—which has not happened of late—it is to the right or the left, before or behind ; but never upwards. France can thus exhibit the two extremes of altitude in buildings—the Eiffel Tower and the peasant's home.

Born on the ground floor, in the country bred, little Jacques, like young colts, has all his troubles before him. Often and often, he eats his brown bread long before he tastes his white. A few days after his

entrance into the world, he is taken to church by the midwife—if disengaged—for baptism, under the sponsorship of his godfather and godmother—one only of each, frequently quite children. His parents, though too hardworking to have much time to spare for devotion, still make it a point of honour and respectability to have all ceremonies of their Holy Mother the Church duly performed upon their offspring. Indeed, the less friendly they are with the Curé, the more they insist on every ecclesiastical rite being administered at the proper age and season.

But, in rural districts, it is an exception to the rule if the relations between the clergy and their parishioners are different to what they should be. When the case is otherwise, and the fault lies on the side of the priest—want of tact, or temper, or other personal disqualification—he is frequently removed by the Bishop to another cure, where he is given the opportunity of making himself more acceptable.

If Jacques were a girl, instead of being a boy, the next thing after his baptism, and as soon as he could run alone, would be the piercing of his ears and the insertion of a pair of earrings. But earrings for men, once generally worn amongst the peasantry, are not the mode at the present day, although rare instances, in out-of-the-way corners, may still be seen here and there amongst elderly people. Some of those masculine ornaments deserve a place as national curiosities in ethnological museums.

Lucky for Jacques is it if he has a sister just a little bit older than himself, who can carry him about on her back or drag him along in a wheelless box, representing a cart, in the intervals when he is not rolling on the grass or playing in the dust before the door. While his mother is at work in the fields, if she do not confide him to a neighbour's care, she may take him with her and set him down, within sight, on a bunch of dry weeds or a wisp of straw, covered with her jacket or her apron, to amuse himself as best he may with sticks and stones for his rustic playthings, or go to sleep.

He grows and thrives rapidly all the while. It is the pure air and the simple food—bread, buttermilk, and soup (bearing no resemblance to mock turtle or oxtail)—which do it. His stomach is not clogged and cloyed every day with cakes and lollipops. Perhaps his parents have a goat,

which gives him another playfellow and his share of her milk. When a little stronger, he has the additional fun of gathering green twigs, leaves, and grass for his horned friend's supper, when her tether is unfastened and she is led home to her little stable for the night.

In this way, good little Jacques is not brought, but brings himself, up. If he escapes the accidents to which his fellow-children are liable—does not set his clothes on fire, nor tumble into a wash-tub full of boiling water, nor pitch head first into the muddy ditch on the other side of the road, nor get crushed while trying to hang on behind a fast-trotting cart—he goes to school in due time, now that there are schools in sufficient plenty. In quite recent times, he would have been made to work as soon as he could handle a spade or push a wheelbarrow. And he does work now, when not pursuing his studies.

The past generation in France possessed no School Board ladies who consider what they erroneously call "education" to be the one thing needful, and hold any kind of employment, though productive of board, lodging, and clothes, to be quite a secondary consideration. I was once well acquainted with a man whose book-learning was limited to a knowledge of the Arabic numerals, which he could rudely imitate in a style corresponding to the ugly faces chalked by urchins on a wall. The rest of his calculations had to be performed by mental arithmetic. He knew how to count his money all the same. And, poor fellow, it was not his fault. One day—for one day only—he took it into his head to go to school, without asking permission at home. His father, a small peasant proprietor, gave him such a beating, for leaving his work and idling away his time with the "instituteur," that he never committed the like offence again.

But it is a mistake to suppose that people who can neither read nor write—at present rather rare birds in England—should, necessarily, be either ignorant or unintelligent. Perhaps, the absence of those keys to knowledge sharpens their observant faculties. In the Middle Ages, at any rate, people who possessed neither spelling books nor round-hand copies, were still capable of making history. Book-learning, in its way most excellent, is of little practical use, unless it is supported and backed up by higher qualities, and is

made applicable to the learner's intended course of life.

Jacques Bonhomme, although illiterate, is by no means a fool, especially respecting whatever may concern his own interest. He can make a bargain with any one. He knows how to say neither "Yes" nor "No," until he discovers which way the wind is blowing. He is "raisonneur," fond of argument, discussing a question in all its aspects. If he cannot read himself, he enjoys being read to by others, and is still more pleased when the accomplishment is displayed by one of his own rising lads or lasses.

It is more than likely that young Jacques is one of, for France, a large family of children, coming, in a series of brothers and sisters, regularly graduated before and after him, especially if his parents have nothing to leave, except their good name and their furniture, behind them. They are not over anxious on that account, believing in the popular axiom, that the hen who scratches the ground for six chickens, can scratch for seven. When the amount of the inheritance is a vanishing quantity, the number of inheritors is a matter of indifference.

The case is not the same with parents who have more or less property to be divided after their decease. Two is their normal number of children, a boy and a girl, and not a single one more. Indeed, not a few French married couples are perfectly content to have an only child to whom their combined possessions will eventually go. And not a few French children are quite satisfied to remain only children, sure to receive, all for themselves, the total amount of their father's and mother's leavings.

An only child was once strolling through a fair within whistling distance of his very well-off parents. For so healthy a lad, he had a solitary look; so I said to him, expecting sympathetic agreement:

"But don't you wish you had a nice little brother, to come with you to look at all these toys and trinkets, or a pretty little sister to take by the hand and show her the way through the bustling crowd?"

"Ah, no, no!" he answered, indignantly, as if the mere supposition of a rival were an injury to his vested rights. "No, no! I don't want that. I had much rather be as I am."

The son of a farm labourer, whether proprietor or not, learns his future occu-

pation by seeing what is done around him, and by helping occasionally. He serves a true apprenticeship, which is better than any course of technical lectures. He unconsciously imbibes traditional experience of the relations between soils and crops, situations and seasons, meadows and milk. He acquires without effort the round and course of local cultures; and, what is better, he remembers the lessons. If, by-and-by, he is capable of receiving the instruction provided for special branches of the management of land, such as forestry, vine-growing, and so on, so much the better; but a French peasant is apt to look on innovations of his established routine much as a grandmother regards the grandchild who thinks he can teach her to suck eggs. And there is reason in the prejudice, when it goes no further than caution, and is not too obstinately persisted in. Have we not, at home, persons claiming authority to recommend, in printed leaflets, the conversion of Scotch deer-forests into small, productive fruit-farms, which shall enable their occupants to earn a good living?

Proud is young Jacques if allowed to ride a horse to water, or to drive home an empty cart; curious is it to see the big, good-natured animal submit to be led by such a pretentious mite of a master. Yes, the colossal horse consents to obey the little boy, whose arm can hardly reach the bridle.

But we seldom appreciate the virtues of the farm-horse at their real value; such a good creature, so patient, so obedient, so glad to secure his owner's affections, so slow to revenge any ill-treatment he may suffer. He knows his work as well as his driver; he cares nothing about showing off his airs and graces, after the manner of his conceited brethren in town, and is only anxious to do his duty. He soon tires of standing idle in the stable, and had rather play at working, taking his walks abroad, harnessed to a team where his help is superfluous, than remain doing nothing at home. A very slight reward or mark of approbation wins his honest heart. A piece of bread, or a lump of sugar, kindly given, makes him your personal friend. He takes a natural interest in human as well as in equine affairs; else, why should he come and look over the gate of his pasture, as soon as his first appetite is satisfied, to watch what is passing along the road, what sort of vehicles are there, and which of his friends is dragging them?

I have an elderly horse, courageous yet gentle, who is afraid of nothing except of being left alone in a strange stable, or in a wood. In the latter case, when unharnessed in the midst of the trees, he browses quietly and contentedly enough, casting an inquisitive glance at us now and then, so long as any one remains in sight. But, the moment all of us disappear amongst the brushwood, he is seized with terror so invincible that it would take a strong rope to keep him from breaking loose and running wildly in search of his biped protectors. What is the cause of those groundless fears? Can it be some ancestral reminiscence of wolves and bears, or other prehistoric enemies? I wish he were able to speak in articulate language, for I am sure he would tell me if he could.

The human mite, little Jacques Bonhomme, has, nevertheless, a due sense of his own proper dignity. If he can put on a pair of leather gaiters long enough to reach up to his hips, he thinks they give him the look of a man. Although not sturdy enough to grasp the immense wooden sphere which serves as a bowl in the village game of skittles, he scorns the battledore and shuttlecock with which his neighbours' daughters disport themselves in Lent. His great delight is to borrow a long cartwhip, and practise with it until he can make the lash sound with a crack as loud as a pistol-shot.

In this way, years glide on, until the next eventful crisis of his life arrives. At twelve years of age he prepares for and receives his First Communion. His parents, whatever their private beliefs, would deem themselves, and him, dishonoured for ever, were the rite not properly met and gone through with. So he qualifies for it worthily by attending church at stated extra days and hours, by strict abstinence from meat on Fridays and fast days, and by being taught a catechism, the learning of which by rote would be thought by some of us equivalent to a sentence of several weeks' or months' hard labour. Auricular confession to the Curé is also an indispensable preliminary duty.

When the grand day at last arrives, however straitened his parents may be, they contrive, by pinching, begging, or borrowing, to array him in the prescribed costume. In black coat and trousers, white waistcoat and cravat, and a white silk écharpe or tasseled ribbon scarf tied round

his left arm, he betakes himself to church at six in the morning, fasting, and there receives his Première Communion. After breakfast, to church again; after dinner, again to church for vespers.

This is the first time of his wearing a scarf, which is one of France's official insignia. If Jacques rises to be Maire of his village, he will have to gird himself with his tricoloured sash before performing the ceremony of civil marriage; should he become police-agent in a city, it is the scarf tied round his waist which gives him authority to disperse a riotous audience who are making a disturbance in a theatre.

When possible, and his means allow, on the occasion of his First Communion, young Jacques presents his Curé with an elaborately-moulded or carved wax candle, the thicker and the longer the better. What the Curé does with all his taper-offerings is best known to the wax-chandler and himself. Of course there is a little treat at home, of cake and coffee and other rural dainties.

At the end of a twelvemonth, Jacques once more puts on the same dress, and renews his adhesion to the Church of his forefathers; after which he has nothing to do but to work, eat barrels of soup and mountains of bread, and grow into a strapping young fellow worthy to draw lots for the Conscription and take his turn at soldiering.

WITH COMPOUND INTEREST.

A STORY IN FOUR CHAPTERS.

By LUCIE WALKER.

CHAPTER III.

BUT when Mr. Armitage, after a leisurely journey, reached home, he found Felix in a mood quite the reverse of resigned to his fate, and Mrs. Armitage still less inclined to accept matters as her liege lord had arranged them.

"The house is almost unbearable without Ursula," she complained bitterly. "I cannot reconcile myself to the loss of the child. Each day I feel it more keenly."

"My dear," remonstrated Mr. Armitage, "I have always looked upon you as an admirably strong-minded personage, and as a mother the reverse of selfish; and here I find you lapsing into useless sentiment, just as the weakest of your sex might do,

and showing at the same time an utter disregard of Ursula's real interests."

"I won't defend the weakness of my heart," replied Mrs. Armitage, a little contemptuously. "People who have no hearts themselves are apt to judge sentiment wrongly; but what I do want you to understand is this—that I do not consider you have acted for Ursula's advantage. She is frittering away a permanent good for a little superficial and temporary profit, and what is considerably worse, she is behaving very heartlessly to Felix."

"To Felix!" repeated Mr. Armitage, incredulously. "Why, my dear Nan, you do not mean to say you consider Felix wronged because that childish nonsense of three years ago has been suffered to die a natural death?"

"It was not nonsense on Felix's part," rejoined Mrs. Armitage, warmly. "He was in deep earnest; he behaved very honourably in the matter, too, and I cannot bear to think that the only result for him will be suffering and bitterness. Ursula——"

"Now, Nan," interrupted Mr. Armitage, "do not blame Ursula. If she has outgrown her fancy for Felix I must candidly confess I am glad to hear it. I may be a bit of a Bohemian; but I still have enough backbone of family pride left to refuse to give my only daughter to the son of Felix Martin's father, whom I think I may truthfully call one of the most finished scamps it was ever my privilege to foregather with."

"And is that Felix's fault?"

"No, my dear, it is not his fault; but it is his irremediable misfortune. I have the honour to know that you do not hold my opinion in any very great esteem; but you cannot gainsay the truth of the saying, 'The sins of the fathers,' etc. Of course, Felix is a good lad himself. You have brought him up carefully; that, however, does not clear up the cloud of mystery and disreputableness which clings about his origin. Why could not Martin, when he knew he was on his death-bed, have given some clue to his belongings instead of leaving his child penniless on promiscuous charity?"

"I know," rejoined Mrs. Armitage, "that you have never ceased to upbraid him with what was perhaps an unintentional omission at the last."

"He should not have left the matter to the last. He was ready enough during the time our acquaintance with him lasted, to

make all sorts of confidences to you. You know we had to leave Homburg because his openly-paraded devotion to you placed me in such a ridiculous position. Mind, I did not blame you; you know I never suspected that you encouraged his folly; but I have no doubt others were less charitable when, stricken down by fever, he telegraphed for you, and you hastened back to him, stood by his death-bed, and accepted his charge to burden yourself with his delicate pauper child. Indeed, Nan, easy-going husband as I am, I do not think any one can be surprised that I did not open my arms to the boy."

Mrs. Armitage smiled. It was no new thing to her to hear this story repeated, to hear her husband sum up the evidence in favour of his dislike to Felix.

"Now you had better go on," she said, "and try to recall all that my adopted son has done for me: his patient, self-denying life, his unwearied kindness; and, perhaps, at the end we may conclude that the little pauper whose father left him friendless in a foreign hotel is our creditor and not our debtor. Moreover," she continued, changing her tone, "I am morally certain that it is by your carefully-directed influence, from your continued hints and innuendoes, that Ursula—who looks up to you as her model—has turned with contempt from the honestest love which will ever be offered to her, and taken back the love which she herself once gave so freely; when I think of this, I wonder you can say that the sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children, without feeling that where you have sown she will some day reap."

"Oho!" cried Mr. Armitage; "my paternal prudence is a capital crime, is it? Well, Nan, if your weakness for Felix so far blinds you, I must forgive you, I suppose; but please understand me when I say that the final word concerning Ursula's future will be said by me, and that final word will never—mind, never—be in favour of your adopted son."

In the meantime, Ursula, quite unaware of these stormy discussions respecting her future, was leaving her past behind her with a rapidity at which she herself was astonished. Already across the great gulf which separated her from it, her former life looked dim and strange. There had been a day, she knew—a long series of days—when she had practised crabbed music with diligent, weary fingers, in a dingy room, when her highest hope had

been to emerge from the chrysalis state of study into a well-instructed musician. But those days were over now; she scarcely regretted them. Sometimes, even, she reviewed them in comparison with her present, and felt a sense of relief. In the new atmosphere to which she had so quickly become acclimatised, she felt herself to be a new person. Something of this she said one day to Monsieur di Loscagno; for one of the pleasantest novelties of her actual life was Monsieur di Loscagno's ready sympathy for whatever she was pleased to say to him whenever occasion offered. The present occasion was favourable to friendly confidences. It was evening, and the light of the sunset was fading behind the long slopes of the Paradis; the last violets and the first orange-blossoms were pouring out their scent through the garden where René had joined Ursula.

"And why should you not be a new person?" he answered. "If your Shakespeare is right in saying: 'All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players,' why should you not be a different person here from anything you have ever been before? The accessories, the environment, as the philosophers say, have all changed. You adapt yourself to circumstances. That is all very good and natural, so long as you do not wish you were playing the old part on the former stage." And then Monsieur di Loscagno stopped in his walk and his talk, and looked into Ursula's eyes; a proceeding which translated any answer she might have been prepared to give into the somewhat ambiguous form of a soft blush and a tremulous motion of the lips. "Tell me," he continued, "if feeling that you are a new person makes you at all unhappy?"

"Unhappy!" repeated Ursula. "Do I not look as if I were happy?"

"You look all that is charming and sweet; but I want to hear you say what you feel. No, we won't turn back; let us go a little way up the hill, and then you can tell me if you are really happy here."

"I am very happy," replied Ursula, softly.

"But you were happy, also, before you came to us, so I don't think that confession is full enough. Will you not say that you are happier here than you have ever been? Don't you see, my child, I am jealous, jealous of those old days when I did not know you. I should like to do away with

them; I want here and now to be all that you care about—all your world."

She did not answer. They had wandered upwards along one of the terraced walks on the hill-side to a point where a group of tamarisks closed them round. She looked up and saw the tender tracery of the young shoots against the transparent opal of the sky; the great white moths flashed out of the deeper shadows across the gleams of light; from the far-off shore came up the murmur of the heaving sea and the song of some homeward-bound peasants. She gazed all round her—she wanted to see how the world looked in the great moment which she felt had come upon her.

"Ursula," he continued—it was the first time he had called her by her name—"Ursula, I dare not tell you all I want to tell, because you will not answer me or look at me."

Then she turned towards him.

"What can I say?" she whispered, tremulously. "I cannot find words to say all that is in my heart."

"Cannot!" he cried, passionately. "Ah, child, you can if you try. It is not enough for me to have a half confession. My love, my heart of hearts, I will not let you go until you have told me you love me—until you have heard all my love for you. No, no, perhaps not all, that would be too long. It will take me many days to tell you all my love for you."

"It would take me," replied Ursula, letting him clasp her hands and draw her close to him, "it would take me more than many days to tell the whole of my love for you. It would take me all my life."

"Tant mieux," said Monsieur di Loscagno, "our tête-à-têtes will never be dull at that rate."

"Ursula, Ursula, where have you hidden yourself? Didn't you hear the dressing-bell? It rang five minutes ago. Jean Baptiste told me you had not come in." It was the Baroness's voice, followed by the Baroness herself, which abruptly closed the scene. "I thought I saw your white shawl going up the hill; and did I not hear my nephew's voice?"

"You did, Madame," said Ursula, as quietly as she could. "Monsieur di Loscagno has this moment gone towards the house."

For René, at the first sound of his aunt's voice, had pressed a kiss on Ursula's forehead, and taken his way rapidly through the trees downhill.

"We need not," he said to Ursula afterwards, "take the whole world into the secret we have scarcely told to one another. For many reasons it would be the height of imprudence to speak of the matter to my aunt. You have already had several opportunities of seeing that she and I are not always unanimous in our opinions. We cannot risk our happiness by placing her in the opposition. Do you think you understand me, my darling?"

Ursula was not sure that she did understand; but she assented. If René wished this beautiful idyll of their love to be read by no unsympathising eyes, she, for her part, was glad that it should be so. The Baroness was very kind to her; perhaps deserved her confidence; but this was a delicate matter, which did not concern herself alone; she could not do better than resign her judgement into the hands of the man who had realised for her her standard of a lover who knew how to love.

Meanwhile, the occasions on which she could see Monsieur di Loscagno "under four eyes," were few and short. The Baroness paid a proper allegiance to that hydra-headed tyrant "les convenances," who multiplies and magnifies the office of Mrs. Grundy in every stratum of French society. Perhaps she had a suspicion that some watchfulness was needed.

"My nephew is paying me an unusually long visit this year," she said more than once to Ursula, as the spring wore on. "I do not think he can possibly stay beyond *Mi-carême*." Then later, with increasing wonder, her exclamation was: "To all appearance, Monsieur di Loscagno intends to remain with me until after Easter. Tant mieux, for I fear that he lives rather a '*vie de Polichinelle*,' at Paris. Perhaps I may even prevail upon him to stay for my fête, which he has not done for years. He always pleads engagements just then; but I know he laughs in his sleeve at the rustic festival we get up in honour of an old woman's growing older."

And as Easter came and went and found Monsieur di Loscagno still at the Villa Estella, Ursula's heart beat more and more wildly with joy at the thought of what it was which kept him a willing guest where he was usually as restless and migratory as a bird of passage.

Madame di Loscagno's birthday fell early in May, when the flowers were in their full glory, and before the transient verdure of the

Provençal summer had perished beneath the Provençal sun and the Provençal dust. It had become, after five-and-twenty years of observance, as marked a day in the local calendar as any of the holidays of the Church. Regularly as it came round invitations were sent out far and near; the villa was turned inside out and upside down with the bustle of multifarious preparations; the garden was decorated with flags, coloured lamps, and Chinese lanterns. A great tent was erected under the trees, in which all the peasants of the neighbourhood were regaled with good things, as a prelude to the rest of the entertainment.

But if Monsieur di Loscagno was going to condescend to grace this festival with his presence, he took care to inform Ursula duly of the esteem in which he held it.

"I am staying," he said, "simply and solely because I cannot tear myself away; because you have bewitched me and made me forget all that I ever cared about before. The fête itself is the dullest of things. The whole place looks like some fourth-rate provincial town on the fourteenth of July. There is a dull dinner, followed by a ball in the evening for the provincial dignitaries, who can neither converse nor dance. Now if I face all this for your sweet sake, will you have pity on me on that miserable evening, and waltz with me every time I ask you?"

Ursula looked at him with a glad light in her eyes. She was never weary of hearing the story of her lover's devotion to her.

"I would dance every dance with you if I might," she said; "but Madame would not allow it. Do you know, dearest, I sometimes fancy she watches me a little, and then I long to tell her plainly how matters stand between us."

"My sweet child," exclaimed Monsieur di Loscagno, "you must on no account give way to such a rash impulse. Have I not shown you how cautiously we must act in the matter? I can only assure you that if my aunt knew all, our halcyon days would be surely and certainly over."

"Then," replied Ursula, with a half-pout, "it will be better for us not to dance together at the ball; and you would be wiser not to come and walk with me any more along the beach."

"Ah! are you a tiny bit vexed with me? That's right. You are never so sweet as when you forgive me, which you always finish by doing. As to the waltzes, we will settle that when the day comes."

But when the day did come, the matter

of the waltzes—which was very prominent in Ursula's thoughts—did not seem to recur to Monsieur di Loscagno as he sat smoking on the terrace, and looking on at the preparations with the air of being decidedly out of tune for a fête. The weather was not very propitious either. After days of unshadowed sunshine, heavy clouds had that morning begun to gather out to sea, and to show signs of appearing as unwelcome intruders over the festival.

"Something has broken the spell of my good fortune," said the Baroness. "Till this year the perfect weather on the tenth of May has been proverbial."

"And how much longer shall you be engaged in this bustle of preparation?" Monsieur di Loscagno asked Ursula, as she passed along the terrace for at least the fiftieth time that morning.

"Are you tired of it already?" she asked, laughing. "I was just coming to ask you to gather me some more roses from the trellis. Will you not come?"

"I will come anywhere you bid me, but I am in the worst of humours."

"Because of all these preparations?"

"No, no; that is a mere trifle. There, never mind the roses, come for a few quiet steps with me. This may be our last opportunity of saying good-bye without an audience."

"Of saying good-bye!" exclaimed Ursula.

"Réné, are you going?"

"I am obliged to go, dearest; it is no choice of mine. I want to make you understand it all—to take you completely into my confidence."

Ursula's heart thrilled with an unknown pain.

"Go on," she said, "you know I care to hear whatever you care to tell me."

"Yes, yes," he replied, drawing closer to her, and taking her hands. "Your friendship, your love, is the only sweet thing in my life. Ursula, when I tell you that I am at this moment a really unhappy man, you must not doubt me. I cannot explain to you better what I mean than by showing you the letters which this morning's post has brought me, like malignant fairies among the mass of congratulations with which the post-bag was crammed. See, here is one from your father, relative to our marble quarry scheme. For this long-delayed letter I have waited eagerly; it brings me a bitter disappointment. The company is no nearer being 'floated,' as he calls it, than it was three months ago. And your father is starting next week for

America to look at a silver mine somewhere or other. Another false hope for some one, I suppose."

"I am very sorry," said Ursula, deprecatingly. "I don't understand these things; but if people will not buy marble quarry shares, father cannot compel them to do so."

"I am not blaming him for what he cannot do, I am blaming myself for wasting my time in building upon sand."

"But does the failure of the marble quarry distress you so much—if, indeed, it can be said to have failed when father only says that it does not take at present?"

"It does distress me," he replied, querulously. "I shouldn't have gone into the matter if its success had not been important to me; and time present, my dearest child, is in reality the only time, so present failure cannot well be compensated by hope deferred. Moreover, here are one or two other communications which you may see."

"Bills!" said Ursula.

"Yes, bills—ugly, prosaic, long-standing, importunate bills, which utterly refuse to wait any longer."

"And cannot you pay them?"

Monsieur di Loscagno shrugged his shoulders. "If I could pay them, where would be my grounds for wailing over them? No, my dear, I cannot pay them, though I have been frequently reminded that their nonpayment will entail the most unpleasant consequences."

"Had you not better speak to Madame?"

"Speak to Madame? About what? About these bills? Not I. My dear child, if she paid every sou of these—which she wouldn't do—it would be but a drop in the ocean; and I should still be a man with an income utterly disproportioned to his wants."

Ursula's heart sank within her. How soon would the blow from this sword of Damocles fall on the doomed head of her lover?

"Oh, Réné," she cried, "what can be done? Cannot you think of anything?"

"I can," he replied, grimly, "though the remedy is scarcely better than the disease; it entails our saying good-bye."

"Well," replied Ursula, cheerfully, though she felt very sick at heart, "we will say good-bye, and wait for better days, will we not? It will pull right somehow."

"Ursula," he went on softly, unheeding

her suggestion, "we have been very happy. It is not often that two people taste such perfect happiness."

"Is it not?" replied the girl. "I should have thought all people who love one another are as happy some time or other as we have been."

"But love is apt to bring trouble as well as joy, dearest. Hitherto ours has been all joy; the trouble is that it cannot, as I wish it could, last for ever."

"Réné," cried Ursula, "what do you mean? Have you left off caring for me?"

"No, my darling," he answered, gravely, "I have not; perhaps I never shall. But you see how things are for me. Do not blame me; no man can struggle against the inevitable. I have still another letter to show you. This will tell you the rest better than I can."

And Ursula read through tears which she would not suffer to fall:

"MY DEAR RENÉ,—I am sorry to learn from your last letter that your position is getting so much more difficult, and that your aunt is still as inflexible as ever in the matter of smoothing those difficulties. Allow me to remark that you recklessly refused a good chance of recovering your financial equilibrium last autumn, when you did not respond to the advances of Monsieur Casimir Meilhan, on behalf of his daughter. My dear fellow, picture to yourself the liberality with which the Lyons silk-spinner would dower Mademoiselle Meilhan if she emerged from the parental cocoon as Madame la Baronne. Will you not reconsider your refusal to enter the bonds of Hymen with this prize? I know for a certainty that your former hesitation has not blasted your prospects of final success. Father and daughter are still open to offers. A word from me would suffice. Come to me without delay, if you see wisdom in my plan.—Yours, LEON DE CASTERAN."

Ursula read this letter twice slowly, and without comment. Then she looked up.

"And you are going at once," she said; "you do see wisdom in the plan?"

She spoke so calmly that her companion was puzzled. He had expected a scene—tears at the least; and she had swallowed down the first appearance of them. If he had known she would have minded so little, he would—he thought—have made

a less elaborate preamble, or even have left her to hear the news from his aunt.

"My dear child," he said, "I am so thankful you see it in that light. You are an angel. Ah!" he went on, taking her cold hands, "why are not you the well-dowered one? Perhaps we have been foolish; perhaps I have done wrong."

"Perhaps!" repeated Ursula, drawing away her hands; "why do you say perhaps?" Then she turned away. "Ah, Madame was right," she said. "The thunderstorm will be over before lunch. I must go and get the roses quickly. Do not come with me. I had rather be alone."

So she went and left him. Her sweet idyll was over, lost in a passion of pain so keen that she wondered if she should outlive it. Her troubadour was false; he had charmed her heart away for an idle pastime. The roses on the trellis hung their heads languidly to the coming storm; the orange-blossoms loaded the air with heavy fragrance. She let them stay where they were. Forgetting why she had come into the flower-garden, she sat down beside a low parapet, leaned her head on her folded arms, and gave herself up to the first gust of the tempest within her. Of the tempest above she took no heed. She did not hear the low, angry muttering of the thunder, nor feel the plash of the first great heavy raindrops. Once when a mighty crash re-echoed above her, and nearly stunned her, there shot through her bewildered mind the thought, almost the wish, that the next bolt might fall on her aching head, and end her sorrow and bring her forgetfulness.

A couple of hours afterwards, when the sun had begun actively to dry the dripping trees on which the flags and Chinese lanterns hung in tattered shreds, one of the gardeners hurrying round on his way to restore such order as was possible to the outraged decoration, found Ursula still lying where she had thrown herself beside the parapet.

"Mon Dieu!" he cried, "where will the disasters end this day? First such a flood of rain as we have not seen these ten years, and then the pretty little English demoiselle struck by a coup de tonnerre. It is as if Monsieur le Baron had cast the evil eye on the fête, with his unwonted presence."

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